

Requiem Fires

POEMS

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Requiem Fires

I

Bianca, the white one, a hundred thousand days your
heralds, sunrise and sunset, have immolated
themselves in the fires of your purity. Yet still you
are a rose petal of night wrapped in the whorls of
my sleeping tongue as it dreams the seven seas of
harvest while drowning in the small shell of your
ear.

For you the beach of lidded eyes will open and give up its
rumor of white foam as you step from star to star
along the night-strewn sands.

For you the sea's blue wind will open hidden gates within
the branches of the pines, and through them will
come forth auguries of the rain.

The whispered secrets of your wisdom shine among the
green knives of the grass or hang suspended,
stopped like a fly in the shatter of the spider's
windshield.

Bianca, you are the white one, and so no poppy can console
us as we wait here longing for the blood of your
kiss, the darkness of your parted lips.

II

The twilight of your speech whispers through the husk of
dry leaves.

The wind pins each one to its open eye for an instant, then
discards it, rushing onward to tangle in the auburn
beards of wheat leading downward through the
darkness of your open thighs, there at the burning
limit of the world.

My sunset speech flares in the living syllable of breath,
laughs at the mare's tail tinted pink and orange.
Yet the horses of the night have slipped beyond the harness
grip of chill late flowers hanging in my grasp.

Still, inside the nacred shell of the white moon, the chorus
of the drowned sighs out its surge and blood beat,
albeit tinily and far off, high in one corner of the
night.

III

Your naked body in the dark room shows dimly white. And
only now do I think, Who is this really?

We have nothing in common except life itself.

The ash of your skin blows away, and the coals lie beneath.

Our two forms on the wall. Your arms and your legs and
your legs. And I a Laocoon in the hydra of shadows.

My breath clouds the glass of your cheek. It blows away
the soft ash of your skin, and the white coal beneath
glows brighter still.

I see it so clearly now in your eyes. Yet I almost can't bear
to look.

IV

You shake the dead leaves of night from your train of stars.
Circled in green branches, your eyes close on the
chaff of the city, and only the wheat of time is
gathered in your arms.

Born with the rain on your breast, the tall grass through
your hair, petals of wild flowers in your heart and a
poppy of darkness asleep beneath the roses of your
tongue,

Your waist is the path of moonlit dust I must tread to the
end of my days; your arms are the labyrinthine
circle of bright sand I must bleed in and die in, night
upon night, gored by the minotaur of dreams.

And yet, for you everything. A thousand lakes and rivers
drain themselves to fill your eyelid of a single leaf
whose skeleton of veins could drink down the
whole sun.

Entire oceans could not drown the depths of earnest sleep
you harbor in the laughter of your eye, the hoarfrost
moon.

Yet still I come, setting my two feet upon the water pebbled
with shatters of moonlight, pacing the deep currents
out beyond the capillary nets hanging upside down
along the green walls of the dark.

V

If life is the first thing and death the second, a third thing
walks through me.

Where my mouth opens, the sand is poured in; where my
ear listens, the paintings have been hung. Where my
eye watches, the music has been conducted.

The others, the counterparts, sometimes called women, I
see but do not see. I feel their presence and yet do
not feel it. Their beauty penetrates my being, but
only as far as my eyes -- no longer the burning form
hanging from the bough of the living tree hidden
inside each breath.

If life is the first thing and death is the second, a third thing
walks through me.

VI

Grey blue of moonlight on the snowfield of the open bed. I
see the pale body lately disrobed.

Yet now her lips of stone will not part to break the
cemetery angel of her smile.

Stone lions shaken from the great hive of the sun appear in
the dusty twilight of the empty streets.

The woman with one eye and three mirrors for teeth waits
for me at the end of the block, my name, in
hieroglyphic script indecipherable to all but to me
and my double, is inscribed upon her tongue, on her
arm, and on the bottom of her sandal.

VII

You, the darkly shadowed, anointed with the blood of a
million doves whose hearts are red roses dreaming
of suicidal flight

You, the illuminated, initiate of the mantis who waits
reading from his breviary of green far deep in the
hill of tomorrow

You, the immortal, who come with a doily of frost to cover
the infinite couch of the grass

You the pure and impure at once and by means of thought
divorced from the body, who come from the sunset
of iodine in a coach of dust

You, the unholy and holy, who govern all things with your
branch of green pine broken from the arm of night's
water, who bless the green points of the aphid's eyes
with the resurrected halo of dawn, with the
penitential hood of night

You must know that deep within me are five rivers
following five valleys spreading from the sun,
valleys of arterial tree roots flowing from a burning
stump

Deep within me are five instruments, the concert of savage
bird voices gathered in the treble clef of noon,
quieted in the lento of the evening, silenced in the
unwritten sonata of the night.

Deep within me, pond ripples touch the four walls of five
rooms lying sunk beneath the lake of windows
whose glass was molten in the kiln of the sunrise

Deep within there are five keys to the doors of infinite
houses where the endless heights and depths of the
nightmare's stairwell leads to the owl's autumn
sanctuary far away in a closet in the dusk of the
cedar wood

VIII

Only one key can unlock the gold ciborium hidden by
moths in the side of the oak tree.

Only one key is like a match whose faintest sulfur scent is
left on the fingers of the glove which, in the realm
of the apparent, has been taken for my hand.

Only one key has five roses twining around it, a caduceus
of fire as when a dry stick is burnt far away in the
woods to serve as a beacon.

Only one key for me to open the boathouse where a hollow
acorn is the craft I must use to sail into the velvet
water of the dark, the infinite depths of the oak
leaves.

IX

Oil derrick of night that leads to a black pit in the sky, and I
have fallen down so deeply here, so far from
original starlight.

My voice cannot climb past oil echoes of multiform
coverings, wrappings, in which are concealed a
black carbon ash, the null substance, beneath an
apparent diamond of mirrors.

The tunnel-like well leads down to the forest of charred
table legs, all that is left of the burnt house of cards.

With a voice of oil slick and a face of oil ash, with my eyes
cataracted with carbon lace, gypsy moth wings of
bitumen and benzene,

What can I see and what can I say? How can the aura of the
Moonlit One appear?

How can the furrow call to the seed and the golden dam-
burst of wheat journey toward sunrise on green
waterways?

How can the diamond of rain fall into the spider web of my
hand?

How can I reclaim the sixth sense of the days of
awakening, moments of amazement beneath the
green rain-chimes of April's woodland?

How can the aura of the Moonlit One call to me in the
necessary silences of silence?

X

The amber wheat field tilts away from the methiolate
sunset and slopes down to the black fringe
of wood, to the grey-green and light-burnished
river.

The evening colors are so deep and rich, surely they must
be trying to speak the truth.

Two figures are wandering there along the bank,
whispering. One carries a pine branch, and the
other some cut wild flowers.

Sometimes, separated, they call out to each other, and their
voices are heard on the opposite bank, although no
one is there.

And while they are walking there by the river they are also
walking above in the field of broom-yellow wheat
seething and tinted pink in the red light from the
sun.

For they are counterparts, wandering. Which are the souls
and which are the bodies, in the late light, near the
green river, walking?

XI

Friend from earliest times, dim in recollection, you exist in twilight only. Though often there I see the sun that warmed us as we lay in the tall grass or sat in the garden seat as the bumblebees visited the pink hollyhocks and the July afternoon was bright and warm and silent everywhere around us.

Autumn evening, and your cloak of scarlet leaves. A fireplace was waiting, and I smeared the black ashes on my face and on your face, indecipherable calligraphy, mysterious and beautiful.

Winter night, and hundreds of eyes inhabited the darkness of the snow-slashed fir trees. The figures of the stars were very close around the treetops. In the supernatural moonlight every snow crystal shined visibly.

Spring morning, and early youth is indescribable, yet we were playing in the empty schoolyard, the two of us the first ones there, you above in the crotch of the oak and I below you on the ground, looking up, calling.

XII

Your face made of snowflakes melts as my hand gloved
with its own fate draws the inscriptions of
memory -- calligraphy traced on the absence of your
eyes, of your mouth, of your brow of redemptive
light, your aura of intelligent privacy.

Snow-characters brushed on the paper of twilight. Late sun
on the tinted snow fills them with fire and a deeper,
lengthening script of shadows.

XIII

Blood clot of light: sun-artery closing.

The light-cone of evening is a trumpet announcing the
dusk-world.

The woman of crystal, the figure of immaculate glass,
whose form cannot tolerate the touch of a hand, on
whom even one breath leaves its mark, appears in
the street.

There are voices calling from deep in the grass. A bush
casts a medusa of shadow on the cracking mirror of
the sidewalk.

XIV

And there was Levanna, whose smile was a razor flipped
open, in whose glittering eye the seven deadly sins
sparkled.

Levanna, the foundling of tides, whose hair was the stone
sea's harvest of weeds in which bright shells, stray
pieces of the moon's shattered face, were braided.

Levanna, the cresting wave has flowed back, and the
prisoner of foam has vanished in the surf's
disintegrating chains. The captive of moments,
Oblivion, has fled, and the day of remembrance
glitters on the field of green.

Levanna, the medusa has taught you, the hammerhead
worships at your deepest shrine, the burning
enigmas of light cannot shine through your veils of
water to illuminate the black scorpions hidden in the
azure and amethyst of your man-of-war's ice.

XV

Bianca, for you the enormous green fingers of weeds grow
through the iris of sunlight from the depths of the
pond, as though a gigantic hand were reaching into
your convex soul reflected there.

The tongue of every leaf has drunk the seas of light, the
oracles of harvest, the glossary of darkness and the
counted syllables of the rain.

And yet countless and countless still are the dialects of
green for my reawakened daughter, confusing her,
and countless the waves of light on the infinite
sands of Now, splashing her, bathing her, dissolving
her.

Mascaraed Egyptian eyes inscribed as with a letter opener
on the paper birch have read the hieroglyphs of
night.

What are they seeing as we walk past them now? What are
the leaves repeating? What are the roots feeling, the
net of light sunk in the wave of earth?

Yet we know it could only be of you in your earthly
embodiment and of your beauty, which is
not of this earth, Bianca.

XVI

Sunrise fills the birch tree with more eyes than are shown
in its white bark. Eyes of nocturnal spirits, angels of
observance, of watching and listening, are asleep
behind every leaf.

Their forms of supernatural light are invisible. Charged to
exist until they have given the fullest possible
account, none has yet returned to its source.

It could be that they have forgotten their origin or have
been forgotten by it, and thus abandoned to us, here,
in the lost realm.

XVII

(i.m. J.A.)

In the evening the air is filled with a violet loneliness.
Echoes await the darkness and quiet, which the tired
heart also craves. Charred embers of evening ruin,
sunset.

Sources deep inside the night have opened. They address us
with great persistence, albeit silently.

In the spectral hour, I too become a specter. See: the earth
has the thinnest lacquer of twilight poured over it
now. And the moment stretches out so far, like the
shadows. It is the time of longest shadows.

Yes, now I must tell you, it is time for me to confide it:
misfortune has followed me. I come walking back
from the garden, or I have come from my long walk
on the Old Rome State Road at the furthest edge of
town, the dust of the highway on my shoes, or I
have come from a walk late at night when the bats
were flitting from tree to tree, and now you can see
it around me, the shadow of ill-luck. Yes, there are
many types of evil.

I am a man from the country, it is true. We have known
each other all our lives. I am as familiar as the post
by the gate. And yet there are many kinds of evil.

The release from misfortune is merely a step beyond, past
the gate of two maple trees, into the cool northern
night.

XVIII

With your eyes like black coffee, with your voice like a
candle burning, with your speech like a bell ringing
in the Sicilian distance,

With your skin like the petals of a dahlia gathered between
thumb and forefinger, with your breath like the odor
of nutmeg, with your hair like a fire starting up in
the grate in a dark room,

With your carriage like the resurrected sun, with your
mouth made of small dry autumn leaves, with your
two lips of poppy and oil,

With memory, deepest memory beyond memory, like a
cicada calling in the bright hot stillness of noon,
with this page of insignificant markings, with my
foregone lives, with my sawdust desire, with my
searching for the end.

XIX

In the necropolis of the Hanged Man the moths of burnt
paper fill the open mouth of the stone lion asleep in
the ochre light, in the bright dust of midday. O the
silence of the public square.

Yet the Ace of Pentacles is drawn in the dust with a pointer
of shadow, there at the center of the crossroads,
while the diagram of sunset is burned by the
inhabitants of the dark world in order to be drawn
over again tomorrow.

The fire has charred the land stretching away into night and
future time.

The rosary of crow's eyes is lost in the shadowed grass
while the rosary of acorns and chestnuts lies sunk
through the floor of the green pond roofed with the
inverted sun.

XX

It was an image of fate that tangled the autumn streets of
the city where my way was barred with the evening
shadows, where I was forced this way and that.

And there you were waiting, Tarot of golden hair. Did I
create the image of fate from out of myself or from
you?

O the black empty night when I lay in my bed and the clock
that is unseen and unheard, the invisible, was
known in its ultimate presence through every corner
of the room.

How sweet to cling to you swiftly fleeing my grasp. A card
in the deck is like a fish in the stream. Tarot of
golden hair, how bright your green eyes were in the
dark room.

Why do I feel that knowing you was my fate? Why do I
feel my life marked forever?

XXI

Woman of stars, your glass of night filled with the alchemy
of chance, I play the music of evening backward,
filled with the spirit of transgression.

The deep purple of night will drain from your water-
bearing form.

The vessels of night and infinity slowly drain to evening
and the earthly horizon.

Raise the sun just one notch: purple twilight rusts into
sunset. Crimson of late sun over carbon slashes of
charred skin.

Time slips backward one notch more -- orange and amber
rayed and announced in light-cone trumpets of
iodine flooding the forest of melted lead trees. The
pewter of opened earth is furrowed with puddles of
mercurochrome.

The air is amber and lightening as time reverses itself still
more.

And now it is full of flakes of sparkling ash -- here, here,
here -- fireflies rising like effervescence in the
dimming glass of evening, small bits of ash still
burning, flaked off from the fires burning the
crumpled paper of the hills.

XXII

Uncanny the few drops of time that we shake from the
pitcher of night, as we break ourselves into smaller
and smaller pieces, here where fragments of the
moon are dissolved in the black stream.

In the darkness of the yard, petals are falling from the white
roses. How beautiful! Fill my hands with the
tangled voices of your hair, for you know I can give
only myself, albeit it is many selves.

Black roses are twining deep in the well hidden at the
bottom of the green pond. We must walk to the
edge of the world and then slide ourselves onto the
other surface before we can find them. Yet perhaps
we do not really want to find them, perhaps we will
wait here where we are for a while longer.

XXIII

They do not think of the moon and they have fallen asleep
under the rain where the scarlet leaves cover them.

They have grown from the bud of the same rose. It is said
they are strangers to the green pond in which they
are bathing.

When they emerge from the pond, the moonlight will turn
their wet legs to crystal stems. Angels of hoar-frost
and ice are hidden, although in plain sight, among
the birch trees.

In the sun the bathers' long hair will return to its color of
indigo and deepest black. And yet they can always
be found, if you wish it, somewhere in the night.

XXIV

O the cloth of black linen covering the idol's stone face in
the amber-lit public square. Rose and marigold of
sunset. Jellied gasoline has turned the trees to
charcoal in the blood-tinted distance.

Here the petals cannot be plucked from the rose. Here the
one of moon and moth wings is zebra-striped in the
shadows, is ever-retreating, never to be grasped.

Here the moonchild bathes in the fountain yet cannot be
seen.

Here the water itself is stone. It is that which the green-
exemaed dolphins are made of.

O my love, you who are not my love, your dress is a
webbing of unpredictable desires here in the
unnoticed darkness of a world on fire.

XXV

Cryptogram of bones that shine phosphorescently in the distance as one approaches the city. Neon-ravaged night.

The streets sucked so quickly past. Then the black tunnel of time pouring onward. The tunnel-hypodermic is filling with our having-been-there-soon-to-be-elsewhere.

A cross, another cross, an X, numbers, a small rhomboid, cursive script -- lime green, insect-wing red, indigo, turquoise, more-than-electric blue: smeared light-script of desire and mania.

Then spinning darkness and slowed time. Rising we float free of the wreckage. Yet we still do not know where we are.

XXVI

Autumn night. I sit on the edge of my bed. The moon –
very bright -- shines in through the open window.
The light is blue-green, and it shines through the
black shadow-lace and wrought-iron grillwork of
metallic leaves, the branches of twisted iron.

The dark leaves, shivering in the wind, are matte black
against the luminous night sky. The bed sheet is a
dim blue-green in the moonlight. My feet rest in a
luminous puddle.

Then I take off my shirt. It falls to the floor in a crumple.

It looks like a clot of milk-skin that you skim from the
surface of heated milk. It lies looking dim and
remote at the edge of the light's semi-circle.

When I roll back into bed, I am like a diver rolling
backward from the side of a boat. I fall for an hour
before I at last break the surface.

I fall staring upward. My eyes are open or half open. Then I
forget myself and they close. With no one to see
me, or to see out of me, I vanish.

My body is left behind like an empty boat on the surface of
the night. Only the anchor-like weight of my breath,
tautly resisting the attraction of moonlight, holds it
in place until morning.

PART TWO

I

With your cleft of five candles and your breath twined from
strands of wood smoke, you have placed the roots
of the spreading chestnut tree at the base of my
tongue, and my speech must now be all dark nuts
and leaves, cool wind, the wet grass and rain.

With your heart of four apples and a dandelion seed-puff,
you touch the dry stream bed of my throat and it
fills with a braiding of water and light.

With your belly of burning wheat and your bed of crimson
leaves beneath the blue cloak of the autumn night,
you speak words of adolescent passion, clear and
pure like the streaks of rain drops on the starry
panes.

I remember the chill night, your lips and throat of fragrant
smoke, the empty and wind-blown streets, the root-
like touch of your hands. I can still remember.

II

O Bianca, how long we have both loved a forgotten image,
I of you and you, also, of me. O Bianca, white
dahlia of perennial obsession.

Black rain in the surging night drowns my several voices as
I call to the spider of recollection in its intricate web
of dust.

Tuning each voice to the other in the lightless intersection,
I await the coalescence like the needle-point of fire
beneath the sun's myopic lens burning its worm
hole of time through layers of newsprint.

And if it should not come, O Bianca, the whitely beloved,
how should I touch your hem of snow, your bodice
of frost leaves?

III

I am a young boy who brings wild flowers to his mother
that he picked near the fence at the edge of the
garden.

The plum tree holds purple light in the autumn evening,
and the visible forms of five angels gather silently
among the dark green leaves.

The child's face is covered with red leaves and gold leaves,
his eyes grow wide in the gathering darkness of
autumn. How sharp and sweet the scent of the cold
grass is at nightfall.

The friends have departed into the darkness, called away to
their several beds. It will be long before they are
seen again.

Under the white patterns of the frost, the heart of the world
grows still and quiet. It is as if a thousand white
hands of ice, small childish hands, had been
touching and touching it all over.

IV

The icy and porcelain face of the moon shatters and lies at
the bottom of the well.

On the petroleum surface of the pond, the silver eyes of the
drowned open and watch the two walkers who have
started to wade in.

The water is freezing, and yet it feels quite warm to them.

Though they are strangers who met just this evening at
twilight crossroads, they understand each other's
deepest wishes. O the enigma of crossroads.

Though every cell of their bodies is different, they are more
than identical twins.

The tall black grass at the pond's edge is coated with ice
and with phosphorescent moonlight.

The black paper shreds of the bats float above the treetops.
Frantic, calling inaudibly, perhaps trying to escape
the world entirely, they float up higher and higher
into the darkness.

V

The drifting one floats out into the mysterious night: blue
moonlight, the dissolving constellations of fireflies
pinpoint the infinite depths of the meadow.

Have twenty years really passed? I am older and yet,
somehow, not. I stand apart from my life, a visitor.
It passes over me. Yet I do not touch it.

VI

I step down the tilting ladder of moonlight afloat in the ash-silver sidewalk. There is a bright full moon.

Then a flow of black detaches itself from the night hill and, with a silent precise hurry, moves down toward the road in the green moonlight.

It is like a dribble of black ink poured down the hill and over the face of the street, which lies empty of traffic.

A fox? But no, there are several faces dissolved in the wind sock of black which ripples and bulges as a single shape. There is movement but yet no visible legs.

Protrusion of embryonic heads. But it is only one head in a long tube of blackness.

An enormous wooly bear of shadow? Then pairs of feet detach themselves in a vague aura of associated faces; a brief tremor of scattering in different directions. Then coalescence, and the ink dribble pours across the road into the green-black thicket.

VII

I have a god inside of me, a panther who is many gods –
voices of the delta clamoring in my ear.

When I breathe in I know them by feeling; breathing out, I
know them more clearly by thought.

The power trembles, brimming over like a glass. The world
trembles like an over-brimming glass. It is so full
and yet so fragile.

And now, what is the world? Often the voices tell me:
nothing.

And you, in our charmed association, in the aftermath of
our entanglement, ask me again, as though in
desperation: What is the world? Nothing, I have to
say.

Later, I enter you as a man must enter woman. What do I
feel? Is this the moment of my fondest nihilism, just
my own heartbeat?

VIII

To go until one is stopped, and never to be stopped. The
coal in my eyes, whitened, grows cooler and gray.

I have the eyes of a stone lion, a jaguar of dust asleep in the
ochre light of the evening square.

Never again to have the blood-rose transfused through my
veins: O white beauty, life is yours entirely, I can
never rest in your absence.

Even the night's delta and the piranha-laced Amazon are
quiet at last.

Northern pocket of shadows, if I could rest in you, near the
walls of your apple orchards, reclining at length part
way under the earth, beneath an autumn
counterpane of gold and crimson leaves.

IX

The rose-knot laced so tightly in the night, out of the harp strings of moonlit shadows, is wound as close as any fist. Close and tight the petals of the rose which the night wind shakes and shakes.

Blind with whitest roses unpetaling from my eyes, I grope the intertwining strings, so many parts of my body caught and tangled in a vice-grip of silken and gold hair.

How often I have tried to move; how often I have tried to be still, but there is only the enwrapped struggle. A thorn is all I have to show, a thorn which sharply divides me. And I myself am a rose, pricked by its own thorn and leaking its blood away into the night.

X

The tall weeds that grew up through the lens of the green
pond have broken their way into your eyes.

Brown leaves have grown out through your hair, and
yellow straw is thatched together beneath
your tongue.

Earth clods are caked along your fingers. Your breath is the
scent of chill grass near the wood's edge in the cool
evening.

Yet still the silver trout have spawned and flashed like
arrows to the limits of your body.

The yellow sun shone warm and deep into the pool of your
belly. A scented breeze comes in the shape of a girl
and walks the green hill of your shoulder. I cannot
know what you are, yet I know you have floated the
world on a single bead of sweat.

XI

For the muse of nameless grief from whom I first learned
of the hopelessness of men: How I still see you

With your smile of porcelain moonlight, with your heart of
three doves in which the enigma of the Incarnation
is rampant on a field of burning gold, with the
mercury of your tongue on the open hand of my
throat, with the small bird of your heart in the
paralyzed grasp of my two lips

With your eyes of violet death which choked the life out of
my immortal soul, with your lips of velvet hyenas
that laughed at my desire in the African midnight of
our charmed Association, with your belly of clover
beneath an amber sunset on the morning of my
endlessly repeated execution

With your artery of white marble beneath the stethoscope
of my mouth, with your legs of dark enigma in the
blinding clarity of my adolescent desire, with your
night your night your hidden night retreating from
the sun of my imbecility

With your womb which was preparing to conceive a child
which was not mine, and yet the child lives now and
is, in a sense, I myself reincarnated in the
unfamiliar dimension of love

What was I before your teaching, your tutorial ardor in the
art of loss? O purest light of my absolute darkness,
how I recall you still, for after all you were my first
teacher and from you I learned the infinite richness
of suffering in the poverty of the world

XII

With your skin made of moth wings as green as arsenic
which you spread open wide to reveal the cherished
chrysalis of light you carry within

With your skin of staring eyes spread like the peacock's
tail, hieroglyphic as the eyes of the white birch and
all of them tightly closed

With your mouth like a narrow crease in a bed of white ash
beneath which five coals still sparkle in the dark of
your skull

With the moon of melting ice which you carry between
your teeth of parched corn

With your fingers of crab apple branches and your nipples
of mullein, your heart like a dried milkweed purse --
O the silken threads of softest platinum, the angel
hair of a lizard's throat pouch

A thousand times and a thousand times more I have gone to
the well to gaze at your rippling and elusive
darkness

And yet it is always around me

Open the eyes of your skin beneath the shell of nacreous
light forming like mother-of-pearl around the black
yolk of your sleep

The Luna moth cannot hide all of day inside the green of its
blind eyes which are seeking and seeking inwardly,
your skin cannot continue to hold all the blackness
of my longing in its silken folds and shadows

XIII

How strange the black perfume of your negligent roses and
how strange the taste -- the sweetness of the
bitterness of sweetness. Yet for this, three doves
have been sacrificed, bleeding into the chalice of
your mouth.

A thousand nights wild horses fell asleep in the moonlit
silence of the public square. Your sovereign power
summoned them, your majesty of orchids and of
jasmine compelled them to be still.

Over and over in drunkenness and folly I gathered in my
arms the frozen streams of your kisses. The river
was full of eyes, and these became a torrent of
white corpuscles streaming past.

Dust was the color of your eyes, and ash, and these were
underneath the bright flame of your tongue.

With a rose thorn I disemboweled myself, searching
through my entrails like a spider through its
web.

Your face I found there in the amniotic chords and dark
strands, these were also your hair. Your blood I
found there and the indelible stains of red petals.

XIV

O bright pathways tangled inside the rivers of every leaf
where the sun has burned and set ten thousand
times, sunk in the embers beneath the coal of the
tree's bark -- bed-of-coals life hidden just beneath
the ashes of the world.

Hemorrhage of crimson sunset, blood clot of final sun, and
the spider of darkness beneath the earth's edge
entangles the world in a webbing of stars.

Emptiest night wind. The leaves of the maples are asleep,
their eyes tightly closed. Yet the eyes of the birch
trees still watch you with interest.

Always at night you walk home by yourself. Lonely
pathways on earth.

Emptiest night wind of emptiest earthly night. Yet still:
bed-of-coals life beneath the ashes of the world.

Search for it with bare hands through the grate of dawn.

XV

Long shadows from the orange and crimson sun. Charcoal
and crowbar outlines.

O the black bars fixed across the world, trellising, grating
the world, markings from the alternate, the
unencountered realm.

My shadow, too, is the grating of my other, my alternate
self.

See, in the shadow of the bare tree on the sun-illuminated
pavement -- the arteries and veins. Appalling.

And there amid the copper-moted glare, in which my
watery gaze dazzles and wavers, there is
something else approaching.

XVI

In the backyard of autumn the apple tree stands in the blue
rains. At night infinitely distant stars flow around it.

The earth -- untouched, scarcely visited -- flows up through
the tree's black roots and twisted branches.

Yellow apples lie in the grass. How slowly and fragrantly
they are rotting.

For the world has not yet been seen and nothing is what it
seems to be. Always.

Yellow apples rust-spotted, with drops of rain on them, lie
in the wet autumn grass.

The apple seems to be old beneath the names that it has
been given, yet nothing is ever old. These things are
only waiting.

XVII

Bianca, the scent of the summer hay and of thyme, the
uncut fields stifling sweet with the scent of grass,
honey in the trapped sunlight of combs like water
trapped in ice, the wheat grown bright yellow and
on fire in the sunset wind.

A spirit simmers in the fields at noon.

In the mysterious shade, in the dark-colored woods, the
noon is still, almost silent. Yet it is not calm.

O Bianca, your white shadow must pass, and yet your steps
are silent.

It is because you too are of the grass. Spider web roots
tangle in net upon net, black corners of earth where
daylight cannot penetrate. Yet it is there your
passion grows strongest.

And there the soil, in your name and in a likeness the
apparent world takes to be you, breathes its own
sleeping counterpart breath -- the inhaled exhaled,
the exhaled breathed in. The earth's builded decay,
year upon year.

Where the sunlight warms the garden's leaves, the green
leaves of the pole beans, the broad sunflower, the
tomato plants, the green entangled flowered vines of
peas, the thicket of the garden in the hot still noon --
so overwhelmingly bright that surely some
inescapable truth is there -- we feel your moving,
your unseen presence.

XVIII

A hundred thousand words like autumn leaves have fallen
through the branches of my thoughts, yet where will
I find an image for your hair?

It is like a tangled garden in late August when the constant
heat is audible in the loud cicada's humming. There
is something of this in the warmth and fragrance of
your dark hair.

And how like the scent of your skin is the heat of that
garden and that damp earth. Let me put my face
close to your ear. One by one I would follow out all
the threads...over your temple and then your cheek.

Your hair is more beautiful than small webs that hold the
prisms of the rain, your eyes are clearer than the
rain, and your skin tastes as the rain does when the
rain is filled with sunlight.

XIX

O the black routes. On the dark window the snow has made
island-like shapes. Suddenly she's there. In the body
of a young woman.

Drifting, like a bather in black water, she slowly stretches,
slowly rising and turning, like a scarf of pipe smoke
in the air.

Slowly she rises a bit further, fades, lost among the shapes
of snow on the pane.

XX

For a moment I dreamed. I had been reading, but the book bored me, and I dozed off for a second.

During my short time asleep, which seemed very long, as though each second were drawn out longer and longer, like egg white drooling from the edge of its cracked shell, I dreamed a decision had to be made -- urgently -- by an unspecified party intensely preoccupied with the position of my head.

Whispering voices like the sound of paper rustling or like the silken rush of sand -- these were deep in the yolk of my brain. Near-deafness: it was as if two hands covered my ears.

And the matter, the urgent matter, had to do with the word *across*. At what point should it be divided? Yet in the dream, somehow, the word was also my tongue.

The sense of the word and its image in my head had fused with the physical sense of my tongue, which now was a bee buzzing silently. And the question of where the word should be divided applied to it too: just where should my tongue be cut?

By then I had reached a deeper stage of sleep. My head lolled forward but, in a sudden reflex, my neck jerked it back upright, as though with a sudden snap to attention -- like someone who catches himself dozing at the wheel, or like someone under whom the hangman's trap door has just opened.

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliché?

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much

of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that

you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

*There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps
that's a good note to end on for now.*

*But what were you trying to do in these poems in
particular?*

I was experimenting with a surrealist style, inspired in part by the poetry of Philip Lamantia. I sent a copy to him, in fact, and he was extremely enthusiastic, raving about them to me over the phone. It was interesting.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.

